

CALFED OPERATIONS COORDINATION GROUP
MAY 25, 1999 MEETING NOTES AND ACTION ITEMS

Review of April 21 meeting notes

Thomas Zuckerman, representing Central Delta Water Agency, included comments to be added to the April meeting notes in an April 27 letter to CALFED Ops co-chair, Steve Kashiwada. That letter is attached to these notes.

The last sentence of the first paragraph under the SWRCB section should read as follows: *"Petitions filed by Oakdale and South San Joaquin Irrigation Districts and San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors were not approved ~~because they failed to demonstrate a real water transfer.~~"*

The first sentence under the Spring-Run Chinook Salmon section should read as follows: *"The large group of spring-run size smolts currently being salvaged at the facilities are not **all** likely to be genetic spring-run."*

Announcements

Jim Snow, chief of the SWP Operations Scheduling Section, will be leaving State service for a position with Westlands Water District. Jim will start with WWD on June 1.

Dale Sweetnam will be leaving the DFG Stockton Office for a position with DFG in Fort Bragg, CA on July 1.

The following handouts were provided at the meeting:

1. Zuckerman letter to Kashiwada (attached) and Kashiwada's reply, DWR
2. Steelhead Critical Habitat Public Hearing Announcement, NMFS, G. Stern
3. Steelhead Critical Habitat Proposed Rule, NMFS, G. Stern
4. 20 mm Delta Smelt Surveys 1- 4, DFG, D. Stevens
5. 1997 Delta Smelt Length Frequency Distribution, DFG, D. Stevens
6. 1996 Combined Delta Smelt Salvage, DFG, D. Stevens
7. Delta Smelt Salvage report for May 1999, DWR, Z. Hymanson
8. Combined Delta Smelt Salvage 1992-1999, DWR, Z. Hymanson
9. SWP Operations Package, DWR, J. Spence
10. Summary Statistics on VAMP - 1999, USBR, J. Burke
11. Mitten Crab Management Alternatives at Tracy Fish Facility, USBR, Scott Siegfried

SWRCB

Phase 2B of the Bay-Delta water rights hearing is scheduled to commence on Wednesday, June 9. This phase will consider long-term petitions filed on December 10, 1998 to supply water to carry out the Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan (VAMP) experiments proposed pursuant to the San Joaquin River Agreement (SJRA). The four petitions pertain to water right licenses held by Merced Irrigation District, Turlock and Modesto Irrigation Districts, Oakdale and South San Joaquin Irrigation Districts, and the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority. The long-term changes would commence in April 2000 and continue for eleven years, through 2010.

The two key issues that will need to be addressed during Phase 2B will be a demonstration of a real water transfer by the petitioners and the presentation of evidence supporting claims of third party injury.

SMSCG Fish Passage Evaluation

The study conducted in fall of 1998 was the first of a three-year evaluation that will be conducted at Suisun Marsh Salinity Control Gates. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of a modification to the flashboards in the SMSCG to provide unimpeded passage for adult Chinook salmon and steelhead. The flashboards are modified such that there are two horizontal slots, (each three feet high) using two sets of spacers that provides passage at different depths.

The evaluation was conducted in three phases:

- Phase I: Standard flashboards were installed and the gates were operated.
- Phase II: The flashboards were removed and the gates were fixed in the up position.
- Phase III: The modified flashboards were installed and the gates were operated.

During each phase sixty-six salmon captured downstream of the SMSCG were tagged with sonic tags, released near the SMSCG, and their movement tracked. Eighteen of the sixty-six tags were depth-sensitive hydroacoustic sonic tags.

The first two of three phases have been analyzed. Some of the preliminary results of the 1998 test are as follows:

- 36% of the fish passed through the SMSCG in Phase I

- 82% of the fish did not pass the SMSCG when they initially came upon closed gates in Phase I
- 41% of the fish did not pass the SMSCG when they initially came upon open gates in Phase I
- In Phase II, 59% of the fish passed through the SMSCG, 27% did not pass the structure and the rest were unaccounted for
- Longer delays in passage were experienced during Phase II than during Phase I, contrary to the '93-'94 test.

The sonic tag data from Phase III is problematic, possibly due to hydraulic turbulence in the vicinity of the modified flashboards.

The 1999 test will change the phase order from 1998. It will begin with the modified flashboards installed and the gates operating, continue with the standard flashboards installed and the gates operating, and finish with the flashboards removed and the gates in the fixed open position.

A velocity test was conducted on flow through the modified flashboards in February of this year and the results were used to estimate velocities during Phase III of the 1998 fish test. Under normal operating conditions, water velocities through the slots would be approximately 1.5 to 4 feet per second, depending on whether the gates were open or closed. Under extreme tidal conditions, the highest velocity would be approximately 5 feet per second.

Reports will be completed in July for both the 1998 fish experiment and February 1999 velocity test.

Fishery Status

Winter-Run Chinook Salmon: Juveniles have not been observed in the system, as is the usual case in May. The USBR closed the Red Bluff Diversion Dam gates in the mid-May. Spawning ground surveys normally begin in May and continue through August, although this year the water is too turbid due to the wet hydrologic conditions so reliable survey data will not likely be available until June.

Salmon size and genetic data are collected at the salvage facilities. The 1995 biological opinion allows NMFS to adjust salvage estimates based on all available data.

A decision is expected in September on the proposed threatened listing of fall-run and late fall-run Chinook salmon.

Spring-Run / Steelhead Consultation: Staff from DWR and NMFS have been discussing temperature issues in the low flow channel of the Feather River for rearing juvenile steelhead. Good temperatures have resulted from the wet hydrologic conditions this year. NMFS stated that it would issue a draft federal biological opinion for steelhead and a conference opinion for spring-run in two or three weeks. DWR and USBR will review the draft opinion. DWR will then make appropriate changes to its application for spring-run take authorization under section 2081 of the Fish and Game Code with DFG to reflect the federal biological opinion as a SWP baseline condition. Both the biological opinion and the 2081 permit are likely to consider operations through March 2000 only.

This summer work will begin on the Biological Assessment for a second year biological opinion that will include fall-run and late fall-run Chinook in addition to spring-run and steelhead. The final federal Biological Opinion is scheduled to be in place by February 2000.

Spring-Run Chinook Salmon: It is too early for estimating how many spring-run adults have migrated to upstream holding areas. Snorkel surveys will be conducted later in the summer. A large group of fall-run and spring-run size smolts are currently being salvaged at the facilities, although the spring-run size fish are not all likely to be genetic spring-run. The State facility is seeing equal numbers of spring-run and fall-run size smolts. The federal facility is seeing 2 ½ times more fall-run size than spring-run size. More than 90,000 young-of-the-year spring-run juveniles were tagged in Butte Creek earlier this year, but none have been observed at either Chipps Island or the salvage facilities.

UPDATE: Seven spring-run young-of-the-year tagged in Butte Creek in January 1999 were recaptured at Chipps Island in April. As of the end of May, many tags recovered at Chipps Island and other locations had been read, so this number may increase.

Steelhead: Six public hearings were held in May to discuss steelhead critical habitat. Proposed critical habitat for Central Valley Steelhead includes estuary areas and river reaches below natural barriers and specific man-made dams. Rivers include the Sacramento and all of its tributaries, the San Joaquin River and all of its tributaries north of and including the Merced River. In the biological assessment, the projects must show that critical habitat is not being impacted. The end of the comment period on the steelhead critical habitat is July 5, 1999.

Splittail: The USFWS continues to work on the incidental take statement in conjunction with staff from DWR and USBR.

Delta Smelt: Preliminary results for the fourth 20-mm survey of the year were presented.

Data Assessment Team

Neither winter-run Chinook nor Chinook in general became a critical problem this season. Fry Chinook salvage peaked in mid-February, but flows were high and exports were relatively low. Winter-run length Chinook salvage increased rapidly in March. As it turned out, winter-run length salvage peaked in March and did not reach the "yellow light". The smolt fall-run/spring-run Chinook salvage began to peak in early April and remained high through mid-May. The pulse flow export reduction had already been implemented, and DAT did not recommend further operational changes.

The DAT received the first report of delta smelt distribution from the first 20mm Survey in early May. Young-of-the-year delta smelt were distributed in the central Delta. The second 20mm Survey indicated that delta smelt were consistently distributed throughout the central Delta and a small proportion were distributed in Montezuma Slough and the lower Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers. Salvage of delta smelt increased dramatically on May 13. The DAT convened on Friday, May 14 to discuss conditions before the weekend. Considering the distribution and growth rate, DFG alerted the DAT that the "red light" might be exceeded in May as the delta smelt continue to grow larger. The operations staff discussed proposed plans to ramp up exports beginning May 18, after the end of the pulse flow export reduction period. DFG recommended keeping the Delta Cross Channel Gates closed until the Memorial Day weekend for the benefit of juvenile Chinook and striped bass larvae.

The "yellow light" was exceeded on May 19. On the May 19 DAT conference call, DFG alerted the DAT that the "red light" would likely be exceeded by the end of the week. USFWS strongly recommended maintaining export reductions beyond the pulse flow period in order to avoid exceeding the "red light". The operations staff noted that planned exports were already being reduced by the implementation of export ramping actions during the second half of May. The USBR stated that re-consultation should be initiated and the Delta Smelt Workgroup should be convened before implementation of further reductions. The DAT recommended keeping the Delta Cross Channel Gates closed until May 28 to benefit Chinook and striped bass, assuming that opening the gates would be of negligible benefit to delta smelt.

The "red light" was exceeded May 20.

Operations

Delta Operations Criteria: The Delta has been in "excess" conditions since the fall of 1997. The Delta Cross Channel gates have been closed since September of 1998 but are scheduled to be opened Friday, May 28. Seven of the fourteen allowable closure days for the May 21 through June 15 period will have been used by that time. The Delta is projected to be in "balanced" conditions sometime in June with the average monthly 14,000 cfs NDOI Striped Bass Survival Standard and the E/I ratio controlling. X2 is currently located at approximately 69 km, halfway between Chipps Island and Port Chicago.

Temporary Barriers: Construction of the Middle River barrier began on May 15 and the barrier was closed on May 18. Gates are tied and locked open until the barrier becomes operational June 1.

Construction of the Old River near Tracy Barrier and the boat portage system should be completed Friday, May 28 in preparation for the Memorial Day Weekend. This barrier will also be operational beginning June 1.

Construction of the Grant Line Canal Barrier continues. Work is scheduled for completion between June 3 and June 7 to avoid a conflict with Memorial Day weekend boat traffic. Operations of the barrier will begin after completion next week if "yellow light" conditions allow and approval is obtained from the fishery agencies.

South Delta Water Agency reported that some members had difficulty pumping in May. They believe this is in part due to the temporary barriers not being operated. SDWA stated that if the barriers were in place they could be operated in such a way as to be beneficial to the fishery as well as protecting water levels on a real time basis.

The head of Old River barrier is scheduled to be installed this fall, although there is currently a problem in receiving a permit from the necessary landowners due to a dispute over the timing of the barrier removal. The landowners want the barrier out by November 1. DFG wants the barrier in through December.

CVP/SWP Operations Status: On April 27, Goodwin flows were reduced from 1,500 to 1,100 cfs for one day to remove trees in the river. Releases on the Stanislaus have remained at 1,500 cfs in May, but are scheduled to decrease to 1,100 cfs through June. San Joaquin River flow at Vernalis is 4,000 cfs. Lake Folsom should fill or nearly fill this year. Keswick releases are 10,000 cfs and

should increase to 11,000 cfs for temperature control at Bend Bridge. Lake Shasta will not likely fill this year. Flow from the Trinity River basin will be high in June and Clair Engle Lake should fill. Lake Oroville is not expected to completely fill this year. There is not expected to be a combined low point problem at San Luis Reservoir this year.

1999 VAMP Summary: San Joaquin River flows at Vernalis averaged 6,900 cfs throughout the pulse flow period, April 17 – May 17. Base flow at Vernalis averaged 4,620 cfs for the same period. A total of 140 taf of acquired water was utilized to supplement river flow. This represented the 110 taf in the original San Joaquin River Agreement plus an additional 30 taf out of a possible 47 taf that was secured when a significant decrease in accretions was observed at the beginning of the period.

1999 Operations Plan: The CVP and SWP agreed to decrease their combined exports to 3,000 cfs through the end of the month. This will increase the amount of export impacts from that listed above. The projects are seeking assurances on make-up for these impacts.

The first proposed tool for make up is a relaxation of the E/I ratio in June. In addition, the projects are looking at Yuba and Stanislaus transfers during July and August and joint point of diversion beginning in January 2000 as part of a make up plan.

Environmental stakeholders are opposed to any CVP make up covered under the final CVPIA Administrative Proposal on the Management of Section 3406(b)(2) water. They are opposed to the use of any ecosystem restoration funding for CVP make up until the USBR demonstrates that they have dedicated the entire 800 taf towards b(2) measures this year.

South Delta Water Agency objects to the proposed acquisitions of Stanislaus water because of possible long-term cumulative impacts.

UPDATE: From April 17 – June 7, export impacts due to ESA and AFRP Delta Actions 1 and 5 are approximately 177 taf – SWP and 136 taf – CVP.

ACTION ITEM:

DWR and USBR will draft a letter to the SWRCB requesting a conditional relaxation of the E/I ratio in June.

Order WR 95-6 as amended in Order WR 98-9 requires CALFED Ops Group agreement to any variation in maximum export rates.

No Name Group

The NNG will meet next week to begin discussions on the possibility of pursuing an E/I relaxation in June. The proposed relaxation will be contingent upon appropriate fishery and hydrologic conditions existing in the Delta during the last half of June. The plan is to achieve consensus within the NNG on the E/I relaxation before next month's CALFED Ops meeting. That meeting has been rescheduled one week earlier (June 15) so that any agreement may be formalized at the meeting and implemented in the second half of June.

Agenda items for Next Meeting . . . June 15